

Money holds key for DuSable Park

By Hal Dardick
Tribune staff reporter

A new Chicago Park District plan calls for a \$9 million makeover of a highly visible but undeveloped park named after Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, Chicago's first non-native American settler.

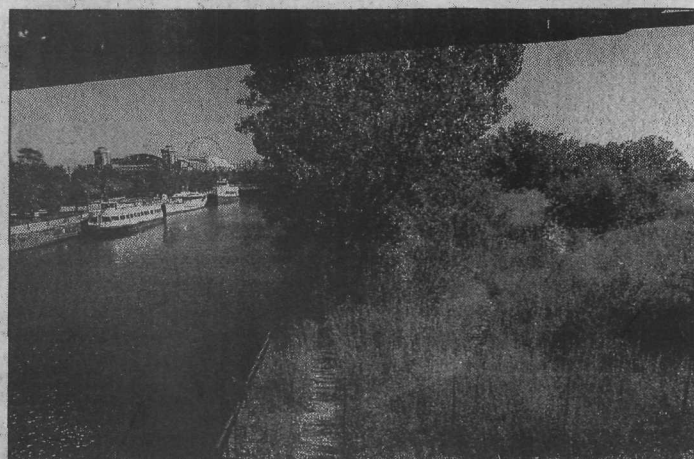
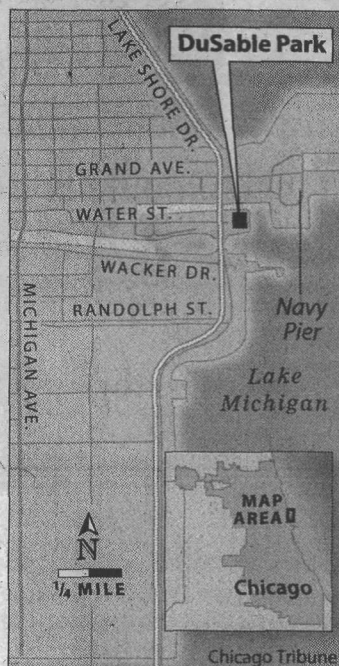
The district last week heard from six of 12 firms invited to submit development proposals for the park, a move park champions said indicated that district officials are serious about moving forward.

The district plans to choose the lead engineering firm for the project on Oct. 19. Plan outlines sent call for the park at the mouth of the Chicago River to be completed by October 2006—19 years after former Mayor Harold Washington dedicated the site.

Whether choosing a firm will ensure completion of the project by October 2006 remains to be seen, said Bob O'Neill, Grant Park Advisory Council president and a member of the district's DuSable Park steering committee.

That's because the district doesn't have \$9 million to pay for the work, O'Neill said. Significant funding must come from outside sources, and money will be sought from federal and state governments and private entities, he said.

"It's highly visible, and so this is sort of a natural park



Tribune photo by Charles Cherney

DuSable Park sits undeveloped just east of Lake Shore Drive and north of the Ogden Slip of the Chicago River.

ing lot.

Two years later, in anticipation of development, radioactive thorium was removed from the soil, which was likely dumped there by developers.

The developed park would both honor du Sable and serve as an urban oasis near a rapidly developing River East neighborhood.

In 1987, Washington named the 3.2-acre peninsula northeast of Lake Shore Drive and the Chicago River after du Sable, a black fur trader who in the late 18th Century set up a trading post in Chicago. A year later, neighborhood developers gave the peninsula to the Chicago Park District.

After that, DuSable Park continued to serve as a dumping ground for local construction crews, narrowly avoided being turned into a parking lot and then—in anticipation of development urged by local activists—became the site of an environmental cleanup.

Today, it's an unused, weed-infested lot in eyesight of Navy Pier.

Under the district's plan, a sculpture of DuSable by abstract artist Martin Puryear would be at the foot of a sloped terrace under a concept plan approved by the steering committee. The sculpture would be on the park's northwest side at its highest point so it could be viewed from Lake Shore Drive.

It would be in a formal, manicured portion of the park. Much of the rest of the park would feature indigenous plants. The park would have fishing areas and landings for non-motorized boats and motorized water taxis.

Erma Tranter, president of Friends of the Parks, said it's not only important to recognize du Sable, but also to develop the park, an "essential" piece to complete the continuous series of lakefront parks in the downtown area.

for public fundraising," O'Neill said. "I think Millennium Park proved that can work."

District spokeswoman Michele Jones said the amount the district will contribute has not yet been determined.

Nevertheless, park proponents said they were heartened by the district's call for development plans, which came four years after the DuSable Park Coalition, forerunner of the steering committee, defeated a proposal to turn the site into a "temporary" park-

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